



NOAA's National Ocean Service

ROUNDTABLES

SUMMARY: THE FUTURE: SUSTAINING a NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY

On July 23, 2004, NOS Assistant Administrator Richard W. Spinrad, PhD, hosted the seventh and final "Ocean Future" Roundtable on NOS's role in Sustaining a National Ocean Policy. Twenty-eight constituents from academia, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector joined Dr. Spinrad and NOS program officials to discuss the current state of U.S. ocean policy and identify the priority actions the agency should undertake to build a more comprehensive and meaningful ocean policy.

Opening Remarks

In his opening remarks, Dr. Spinrad emphasized that the recent series of Roundtable meetings have provided an important opportunity for dialogue with NOS constituents. He outlined several key issues currently facing NOAA, such as the President's FY 2005 budget request and the recent FY 2005 House mark. Dr. Spinrad noted that NOAA's strategic plan forms the basis of the agency's budget request, and that the NOAA FY05-10 Strategic Plan has been recently revised and is currently out for review until August 27. He said that although there are concerns about this upcoming year's budget, this is also an exciting time for the ocean community, with many great opportunities for NOS, including :

- *A major role in implementing many of the recommendations from two recent landmark reports -- the Pew Ocean Commission's **America's Living Oceans: Charting a Course for a Sea Change**, and the Preliminary Report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. These reports examine the broad range of issues impacting the nation's coastal and ocean resources, and make significant recommendations for improvements in the framework for ocean governance.*
- *Leadership in the development of integrated ocean observation and modeling systems, new and innovative navigation products and services, and marine resource conservation and assessment through its ocean and coastal management programs. NOS is currently using a variety of creative communication approaches to engage and educate the public about the importance of balancing the environmental and economic well-being of the nation's coastal resources and communities.*

Dr. Spinrad then presented an overview of a challenging vision for NOS's future -- to be a Global Leader in Integrated Management of the Ocean. Not only does this vision respond to the recent reports, it also provides a focus for the agency to apply its diverse resources to proactively address the growing pressures impacting coastal and ocean resources. He concluded his opening remarks by inviting Roundtable participants to identify ways that NOS could strengthen its global leadership and its contributions to integrated coastal and ocean management.

Constituent Observations

Dr. Spinrad opened the discussion by asking participants to talk about the most important actions needed to build a more comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable National Ocean Policy and the roles that NOS should play in providing leadership in ocean management. During a wide-ranging discussion, the group identified several common themes for NOS to focus upon, including: increasing public outreach and education about



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ocean issues; strengthening partnerships; supporting and implementing recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy; improving NOS leadership and integration in ocean governance; and coordinating ocean research.

Increase Outreach, Education and Public Awareness

Participants noted that increased public education and awareness about ocean issues and about the damage caused by people are crucial to changing public perception. After years of ocean mismanagement, fundamental changes in human behaviors are necessary. Increasing public awareness about the impacts that human activities have on the coastal and marine ecosystems will help people to better understand their role in the interconnectedness of land and ocean. Participants stated that NOS should try to express this message in easy-to-understand terms that matter to society (e.g., jobs, history, ports) and that focusing on the social and economic implications related to ocean health might help increase public interest. Participants were supportive of NOAA's recent outreach efforts (e.g., the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, planning the Smithsonian Ocean Hall) and suggested that the agency continue such innovative approaches to public outreach. They also noted that NOAA should capitalize on exciting efforts such as ocean exploration and coral habitat restoration to energize and engage the public, and that aquaria and interactive educational forums could be better utilized to improve the agency's visibility.

Strengthen Partnerships

Participants urged NOS to strengthen and enhance existing partnerships, and to look for new, innovative partnerships with organizations such as the Navy, the American Medical Association, and NASA, among others. They also suggested that NOS work more closely with professional societies and promote more exchanges between the agency and the private sector (e.g., visiting scientist programs). The group emphasized that NOS and NOAA should also work harder to include the private sector in ocean research activities.

Support Recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy

Roundtable participants felt that NOAA and the ocean community should try to implement several of the Commission's recommendations as soon as possible. A number of participants highlighted the need for the ocean community to work together to develop a unified, consistent message with regard to implementing the recommendations. They also stressed the need for the ocean community to present a common message to Congress. Participants noted that NOAA should attempt to demonstrate the value of integrated coastal and marine management to the nation.

Improve Leadership and Integration in Regional and International Ocean Governance

Participants stated that NOS has much expertise in how to delineate regions, and should take a leadership role in developing the regional approach recommended by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. They also noted that, although NOS is involved in a lot of regional work, it is not clearly expressed in the new NOS vision. NOS should try to increase financial support for the integrated observing system regional associations. Further, NOS should do more international work and share its lessons learned with developing countries.

Coordinate Ocean Research through Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) and Integrated Ecosystem Management

Participants suggested that with less funding for science and research and the need to improve the management of resources, NOS should focus new research on problems identified in the Commission's report. One participant,

noting that “success stories” are needed to advance research and education efforts, recommended using the Integrated Ocean Observing System to broaden public support for ocean initiatives. NOS should, however, try to explain more clearly what the system is and why it is important. It is also essential for the system to include observations and research on the interconnections between fresh and marine waters. Further, participants felt that NOS should strive to show Congress and the public better examples of ocean management successes and develop more useful metrics to track progress toward achieving long-term outcomes. Finally, it was recommended that NOAA research should be more inclusive, engaging talent from a variety of sectors and including more peer review.

Closing Comments

Dr. Spinrad thanked the participants for identifying opportunities for NOS to improve its role in sustaining a national ocean policy, and to become a global leader in the integrated management of the ocean. He stated that this roundtable had the most diverse participants and the most broad-ranging discussion, and that he would like to meet with the group again. Dr. Spinrad suggested that in the future, he would like to broaden this discussion to include participants from sectors not typically associated with ocean policy. Finally, he encouraged participants to continue their existing partnerships with NOS, and welcomed opportunities to begin implementing recommendations that emerged from the discussion.